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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 007682

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: THE FRENCH INTEGRATION MODEL: GOING UP IN SMOKE?

REF: A. PARIS 7599

1B. PARIS 7525

1C. EMBASSY PARIS SIPRNET DAILY REPORT FOR NOV 9 AND

PREVIOUS

(WWW.STATE.SGOV.GOV/P/EUR/PARIS/INDEX.CFM)

Classified By: POL/MC Josiah Rosenblatt, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary and Comment: Continuing violent unrest in France -- only now diminishing after thirteen intense days -- has very publicly brought to light the ugly reality of France's persistent failure to integrate its immigrant population. Importantly, the violence has not taken on religious overtones, nor have mainstream (or, as far as we can detect, underground extremist) Muslim groups sought to manipulate the situation to their own advantage. Indeed, the Muslim establishment has been actively trying to calm the unrest. The government response -- to reestablish order while exercising restraint and to promise to address the underlying issues of unemployment, education, and family breakdown -- seems to be working for the moment. But any longer-term solutions will depend on successfully tackling the underlying issue of social exclusion -- in particular, employment discrimination. This is likely to prove a difficult challenge for any government given France's slow economic growth and chronic unemployment problems. Changing deep-seated attitudes will also be a daunting challenge. Failure could push a largely unpoliticized minority underclass to embrace the Islamic political extremism the French fear most. End Summary and Comment.

Where We Are Now

12. (SBU) Images of rampaging youth hurling Molotov cocktails and defying French authorities have gripped France for the past thirteen days. Although France is accustomed to a certain level of violence (prior to the unrest, the country averaged 80 car burnings daily), the numbers to date are staggering: some 300 towns affected since the onset of unrest, more than 6,600 cars burned, nearly 1,800 individuals taken in for questioning, 11,500 police and gendarmes deployed, and over 100 security agents injured. In response to the violence, the GoF has invoked emergency measures used only twice since their enactment fifty years ago, during the war in Algeria. On the first night of the law's application, curfews were implemented in parts of 25 different departments and appear to have had some success. There were 617 cars reported burned, 280 arrests, and violence reported in 196 towns overnight, as opposed to the 1,173 vehicles attacked, 330 people taken in for questioning, and 226 communities reporting unrest the night before. Press reports indicate that the suburbs ringing Paris were notably quieter November 8 in comparison with past nights.

What the Violence is Not

13. (C) The destruction of both public and private property has been enormous and often self-defeating, as the youths have targeted their own schools and gyms or their neighbors' vehicles. But it has fallen short of full-scale riots. The perpetrators have generally not sought out open confrontations with state security agents, with the notable exception of a birdshot attack November 6 that wounded 10 police and hospitalized two. Similarly, casualties have been relatively limited. One youth lost a hand in a confrontation with police. One bystander was killed after being punched by a youth, and there have been a few instances of other injuries, primarily during attacks on vehicles.

14. (C) Nor has the unrest taken on the tone of an intifada, despite the fact that a large portion of those responsible for the violence are of Muslim background. In fact, Muslim groups have played positive roles in trying to quell the violence. During the first weekend of unrest, a tear gas canister landed in a mosque, sending some 700 worshippers fleeing. While some of the perpetrators used the incident to justify their actions, the leadership of the mosque and many of the worshippers there have downplayed the event in French and international media and actively circulated among the youth to act as mediators. The fundamentalist Union for Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF) issued a fatwa November 6 condemning the violence as un-Islamic.

15. (C) For the moment, the unrest is not viewed as specifically Muslim. The French media, and French commentary generally -- and perhaps deliberately -- identify those

involved as "minority" youth, sometimes specified as Arab (North African) or Black (Sub-Saharan). Rarely are they classed as "Muslim." The issue is seen as a problem of disaffected ethnic minorities, not a local playing out of a clash of civilizations between Muslims and the West. That said, the GoF has alluded to the potential that radical elements may yet seek to use the unrest to try to further nefarious aims. Some commentators see the mediating role being played by Islamic organizations itself as a possible cause for concern.

#### The French "Way" Questioned

16. (C) The recent upheaval has raised many questions within France about its "unitary" (as opposed to multicultural) integration model, as well as the social inequalities and racism that exist in French society. Although many -- particularly on the left -- have been quick to blame the current government, it is clear that the unrest playing out throughout France today is the result of decades of neglect by governments of both the left and right. The role that France's generous social welfare system may have played in fueling the discontent has also come under scrutiny. In many of the areas most affected by the violence, there exist scores of state-subsidized, long-term unemployed (Villepin cited 57,000 in a nationally televised interview November 7) who are provided enough money to survive, but no real incentive to seek gainful employment.

17. (C) Many of the youth are products of homes where the primary breadwinner is among the long-term unemployed. For other young men, there has been a breakdown in the family structure. But the real problem is the failure of white and Christian France to view their darker, Muslim compatriots as real citizens. The cumulative effect has been the creation of a generation of young males lacking parental control and unequipped to secure and hold a job, even if they could break through the formidable barriers of prejudice faced by young Arabs and young blacks in particular.

#### Possible Political Ramifications

18. (C) Nor did the French government do a good job of managing the situation. With an eye to the 2007 presidential elections, Prime Minister de Villepin and Interior Minister Sarkozy initially tried to manipulate the unrest to individual political advantage. President Chirac was conspicuous by his unusual silence. Only belatedly did Villepin and Sarkozy put their differences aside and present a common front. Villepin's decision to invoke curfew powers has been criticized by some in the opposition as an overreaction, but an initial poll indicates that 73 percent of those polled agree with the hard line.

19. (C) It is impossible at this time to predict with any precision the long-term political repercussions of the violence, including with regard to the 2007 presidential elections. It is also too early to know what effect, if any, the events will have on the political activism of the disaffected immigrant population or what steps the government is prepared to take to give minority groups more of a political voice. At present, the immigrant community is vastly underrepresented in all parties and barely represented at all in official positions, from the mayoral through parliamentary and ministerial ranks in the French political spectrum.

#### Comment

10. (C) The dimensions and persistence of the unrest -- and the depth of the frustration reflected by it -- largely blindsided France's political class, which is generally regarded as being far-removed from the lives and experiences of ordinary people. That said, the government response -- to focus on re-establishing order while scrupulously avoiding excessive police violence, and to promise effective engagement to better social conditions -- appears initially to be working. The nightly violence is decreasing, both as police enforce newly authorized curfews in selected areas and as local government and citizens mobilize to defend their communities.

11. (C) While this approach may prove successful in quelling the current wave of unrest, sporadic incidents of car burnings and clashes with police are likely to persist. The youths perpetrating the violence and vandalism -- and the criminal groups that in some cases are manipulating them -- are present in every poor suburb, and no amount of policing will preventively keep them completely in check. While responsible leaders across the political spectrum agree that France must do more to integrate its more recent immigrants, agreeing is not the same as doing. The recent wave of unrest has publicly and embarrassingly exposed France's deep social inequalities, reminding the broader public of the persistence of France's large, probably growing underclass (estimated at 4.7 million by Social Affairs Minister Borloo).

¶12. (C) Once calm returns, the GoF will be expected to follow through on promised reforms to address the underlying issues that have fueled the unrest. But unless there is some measurable amelioration of the structural unemployment, societal discrimination, and widening gulf between mainstream French society and the people of the suburban projects, the nightly violence will continue to simmer just below the surface and will recurrently boil over. The challenge is enormous for the government, given France's slow economic growth and chronic unemployment. Any job creation program is likely to focus on inefficient public-sector programs that do nothing to empower the private sector and provide incentives to the unemployed. It will also be a challenge to change deeply ingrained negative attitudes towards non-white immigrants. However, not to make the effort would squander a crucial opportunity to significantly enhance the well-being and prospects of a disaffected Muslim underclass before it becomes politically radicalized. End Comment.

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